Engaging Fathers and Promoting Healthy Parental Relationships in Home Visiting

Haji Shearer
Director of the Fatherhood Initiative
Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund



Objectives

- 1. Identify the evidence that our father engagement model is based on.
- 2. Share some materials created for the program.
- Describe the FITS model of father involvement in Healthy Families Mass.
- 4. Discuss some outcomes from the FITS model.





Evidence Base

- Started broadly with regional trainings for all programs providing research on importance of responsible fathers. (see examples)
- Revised Core Training that all new staff receive to include fathers and co-parenting in all elements and specifically address the needs of benefits of dads in one dedicated section (about 9% of 6 day training).



Benefits for children



- Less impulsivity; greater tolerance for stress
- Enter school more patient, curious and confident
- Fewer behavior problems in boys
- Girls tend to be happier, more willing to try new things
- Greater empathy



Benefits for mom

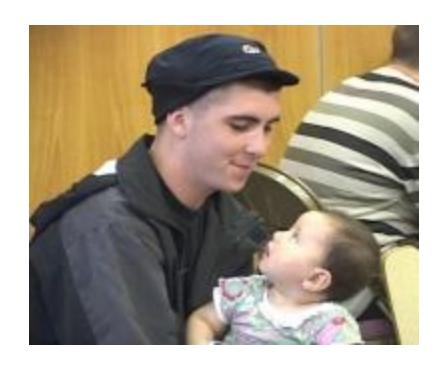


- Mothers feel more secure, patient and flexible when supported by partner
- Strongest predictor of breastfeeding is partner support
- Involved fathers improve economic status of family
- Healthy fathering honors motherhood



Benefits for dad

- Can learn to experience a wider range of emotions
- Develop greater empathy
- Develop expanded ability for caring and compassion
- Enjoy the benefits of a life long connection to children
- Experience greater health, income and satisfaction over span of life





Focus on Fathers and Co-Parenting

- Identify programs that have the greatest potential to grow.
- Hold monthly case reviews with father focus.
- Develop Resource Guide to use with families.
- Use Reflective Supervision to highlight father involvement and role that dad can play.



Evidence Driven

- Developed individual program goals
- During first six months of model, two thirds of programs tripled their rate of fathers on visits.
- Discovered dads were often not counted even when they participated in visits.
- Developed statewide benchmarks.



Next Steps

- Continue to shift home visitors' beliefs toward co-parenting.
- Develop more precision resource materials to address home visitor needs.
- Build stronger collaboration between home visiting programs and DV and BIP providers.

